

## **Independent Study and Honors Project Policy for the Department of Communication Studies**

### ***Procedures for Reviewing Requests to Teach Independent Studies***

Requests to teach Independent Studies [ISs] will be reviewed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee [USC]. Requests should be submitted during the semester prior to the semester the IS will take place and the USC will review all requests during its regularly monthly meetings. Independent Studies may not be initiated or approved after the first Friday of the semester when the Independent Study would be completed. Materials to be submitted include a syllabus and learning contract (see below). Professors submitting requests will be notified as soon as the Undergraduate Studies Committee has approved or disapproved a request for an Independent Study. The supervising professor and the student may be asked to submit revised requests and asked to provide necessary materials that were omitted in the original application. If, in the opinion of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, there is insufficient time to resubmit and reconsider the application, the committee will simply inform the student and supervising professor that the request has been rejected. Should a request to teach an Independent Study be submitted during the summer, the Undergraduate Studies Committee will meet on an ad hoc basis to review proposals. Should such a meeting be required, and members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee are unavailable, the Director of Undergraduate Studies will organize necessary procedures and personnel to evaluate the request. Students and supervising professors should not assume that summer requests will be vetted in the summer.

### ***Materials that must be submitted to the USC in application for an IS***

Independent studies are courses for full credit, as such they require formal syllabi the same as any other course at Carolina laying out clear expectations for course direction, amount of work that will be expected of students, and methods and standards for student assessment. On the other hand they are clearly different from other courses, in part in the very flexibility afforded when a faculty member is able to work in a one-to-one relationship with a student, so it would be appropriate for an independent study syllabus to be formatted differently from that of a regular course, particularly regarding week-to-week assignment. If a syllabus makes clear what weekly expectations for work load are, specific weekly assignments may well be adjusted over the course of the semester in a way that would not be appropriate in a standard classroom experience.

Student and supervising professor must complete a Student Learning Contract (see attached) for the Independent Study. This document is available on the Department of Communication Studies Web Page. The syllabus for the Independent Study will specify the number of hours of work expected by the student in a Learning Contract: The number of hours of work expected of a student would be the same as for any advanced or capstone course: Students should work for 9 hours for every three hours of course credit (three hours meeting with the supervising professor and two hours in study outside the classroom).

The Learning Contract and the syllabus will specify the number of required meetings between the instructor and student in the Learning Contract would, typically, be once a week or twice every two weeks.

The syllabus will specify the reading and writing assignments required to complete the independent study. Due dates will be specified for all assignments. As an independent study is an

upper level course, there should be a substantial writing component to an Independent Study taken as a whole.

The student and the supervising teacher should reach a mutual understanding of how the student's grade will be determined. The syllabus will describe this assessment procedure and criteria for determining the student's grade.

Student and the supervising professor must submit a 100 word work plan. This might be analogous to the introductory purpose statement provided in the typical class syllabus.

### ***Additional Information***

There are limitations to the number of Independent Study Projects and Honors Projects a faculty member may supervise. According to policy established by the University of North Carolina, the maximum number of projects that faculty may supervise is two (2) IS in Fall semester, two (2) IS in the Spring semester, and two (2) Honors Theses in Fall/Spring: A total of six (6) projects for the year.

Individual faculty members have their own numbers for all independent study-type classes. Once approved by the USC, the student should register for the independent study under the supervising professor.

Applications and Student Learning Contracts will be maintained in the office of the Student Services Manager in the Department of Communication Studies

### ***Honors Thesis Research Guidelines***

Senior honors thesis work is a specialized form of independent study that allows students to graduate under the designation "with honors" or "with highest honors." Honors research proposals represent a serious commitment to extensive study and mastery of material, and should be developed in close consultation with the faculty advisor.

Supervising an honors thesis is an important responsibility, but is generally in addition to the standard course assignment of an individual faculty member. Therefore, faculty are under no obligation to supervise any or any particular number of honors theses. Each faculty member who agrees to supervise an honors thesis will be assigned a section of COMM 693H during the fall registration. The number of students being supervised in this section should be limited to two. A learning contract similar to the independent study contract should be developed for all honors thesis work, prior to the beginning of the fall term. It should include an outline of the scope and direction of the research, a schedule of meetings, target dates for submitting interim chapters and/or reports for review, as well as the expected date for the submission of a near-final copy of the thesis to be defended.

At the end of the fall semester, the supervising teacher will submit a grade for the student. At this time the student and the faculty advisor will meet to discuss the student's progress. If at this time the faculty advisor deems the student's progress insufficient to warrant continuation the faculty advisor will notify the student of this evaluation and the student will discontinue work on the thesis, an enrolling in a traditional course for the spring semester, or, if the faculty advisor is willing, continue to advise the student's project as an independent study project (enrolling in COMM 396 Directed Research).

Work on the honors thesis is done with the mutual consent between the student and the faculty advisor. It is the responsibility of the student to seek out and find a faculty advisor. Faculty members are, generally, more willing to advise an honors thesis project when they have

a prior relationship or experience with the student. Faculty members are also more willing to supervise a project if they have a professional interest in the project topic. So, students are encouraged to begin conversations with a faculty member about the honors thesis project during their Junior year. After securing a faculty advisor, the student and faculty advisor will seek two more committee members (or “readers”) to constitute the thesis committee. While the faculty supervisor is expected to work closely with student, readers are expected to read only a completed or nearly completed thesis and participate in the thesis defense. At the thesis defense, committee members will critically examine the student and the student’s work. If the committee determines that the student has passed the thesis defense, the committee will designate the thesis as warranting the designations “with honors” or “with highest honors.”

Only tenure or tenure track faculty are eligible to supervise an honors thesis. Graduate students and fixed term faculty are not eligible to supervise or sit on the committee.

### **Department of Communication Studies Policy on Special Topics Courses**

Special Topics courses in the Department of Communication Studies are taught for new or novel courses on an experimental basis. When a special topic course has been taught more than twice, the course should be given its own number within the department curriculum and made a regular part of the academic curriculum. Under no circumstance will a faculty member propose a special topics course and enroll multiple students for the purpose of supervising multiple independent study projects. Special topics courses must be approved by the faculty members unit and, subsequently, approved by the Undergraduate Studies Committee.